

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report #16

September, 1977

FOCUS ON RAPE

As our population increases, violence will increase. And so will the violent crime of rape. Rape is the most elusive of all crimes. It is the least reported and least punished offence. And yet it has brought untold physical and psychological suffering to both female and male victims.

Rape was an offence from earliest recorded times in most societies. The probable origin of the word rape can be glimpsed in the term, "rapere," common in Latin, Middle English, Old French and Anglo-French. "Rapere" means "to seize." The same root lies in "rapine" (plundering, robbery), "rapacious" (grasping, extortionate, predatory), and "ravish" (carry off by force, take from life or from sight).

Many myths surround rape. Myths are outmoded concepts which once reflected an accepted construction of what was real. The trouble with myths is not that they are wholly false. If they were, it would be easy to disprove them, and thus dispose of them once and for all. Rather, they contain little nuggets of what once appeared to be true; and, perhaps, a distortion of facts.

The belief that such myths are fact, and the retention of them, is dangerous. Such myths tend to masquerade as reality and thus it is difficult to get a society that is not prejudiced by such ideas. Consider the following ideas about rape, and then look at the effect they have on your judgement:

- A woman with her skirt up can run faster than a man with his pants down.
- If a woman isn't a virgin, it doesn't matter anyhow.
- Women are temptresses. They ask for it in their manners, how they dress, and so on.
- In most cases NO means YES.
- Rape occurs between strangers.
- Most rapes occur in back alleys.

And so the myths go on and on. For too long the whole topic of rape was one not to be discussed in public, to be swept under the rug. At least today we have begun talking about it, and that is a beginning. Myths are so tragic and destructive when accepted as reality. How anyone could believe that any human being, woman or man, could enjoy being attacked, could enjoy being exposed to injury or death, could enjoy being treated in a humiliating and brutal fashion, is preposterous. We laud women who are attractive, but those unlucky enough to be attacked are dismissed as tramps. Our society actively encourages clubs for singles, but we label as promiscuous those who are

attacked by men they meet at these clubs. And the saddest thing of all is that so many people do not see anything inherently horrid in these attitudes.

--Erna Klassen

Special thanks to Erna, a Task Force member from Edmonton, Alberta, who wrote and collected materials for this issue.

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RAPE AS A POLITICAL CRIME

Rape is a political crime. That is to say, it is the one undeniable symptom that in one group is lodged the power and headship over another group. When God created male and female in His own image, there was no granting of power one over another. God blessed them both saying, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." And God saw that it was good. When humankind created society in its image, the male was cursed with power, the female with pain. And society said to the male, "Be aggressive, conquer, fill the earth with your laws and dominate." And God saw that both male and female became the pawns of this society. Enslaved in a power relationship, the male became the focal point around which society revolved, the female became his property.

This paper is about rape. No matter whether it be "legal" rape (i.e., the ancient practice of bride capture), war rape, racist rape, child rape, homosexual rape, or culturally-fostered rape (submitting to social pressure); all rape is sexist rape and a product of the power relationship between men and women. (In the case of the homosexual rape, both assailant and victim may be male. However the sexist imagery is still there. For example, in prison rape the process is referred to as "making a women out of someone," and the victim is tagged with the nickname "gal-boy." And it is still the same power structure of the "strong" over the "weak.")

Around 28 A.D., Jesus spoke the words that would lead us back to the interdependence which God created of which humanity is in such dire need; "You have learned how it was said: you must not commit adultery. But I say to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt. 5: 27) In other words, Jesus expands the concept to say that adultery or rape occurs when one simply views another as an object, an inferior to be owned and used for one's own pleasure and purposes, completely disregarding the other's humanity. Power or the pursuit of it is the greatest temptation to regard those in the way as subhuman (i.e., imperialism, nationalism, racism, sexism), so when a male gets the message that somehow he is superior, the authority, the head, try as we do to deny it, the danger is always there that in order to reestablish that power or to protect it, his method of gaining control will be to create an attitude of helplessness and inferiority in a victim. The guilt of rape not only belongs, then, to the rapist, but also to those who cooperate in a system that perpetuates male dominance.

Sad, but true, the fact is that the very ones who should be heeding their Lord's words, walk hand in hand with such a system, and in the process claim God's sanction for it. The spirit of Jesus' message, which affords wholeness and dignity for both male and female, lies dormant in our churches. Such "Christian" literature as Marabel Morgan's Total Women or Bill Gothard's "Seminar in Basic Youth Conflicts" simply reinforce society's stereotypes of the power relationship that Jesus rejected. They actually foster the conditions for rape. Their propaganda clearly teaches men to be conquerors and women to be their victims. Pornography accomplishes the same goal! The popularity of such apostasies is frightening! What one usually does not realize, however, is that in the long run, both men and women are the victims by selling out their right as humans to fully relate interdependently. When Christianity fails to call men and women to an alternative to the power

relationship, it sacrifices its intended creative witness to the world and becomes a mere reflection of society.

The society that it reflects is in its own constant state of reinforcing the power relationship of men over women. In her book, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, Susan Brownmiller sets out the thesis that rape is not a random act by deviant or troubled men, but it is a world-wide societal mechanism by which men control women:

"It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear. Rather than societies' aberrants or 'spoilers of purity,' men who commit rape have served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas in the longest sustained battle the world has ever known." (Quote from Brownmiller taken from "Revolt Against Rape," Time, Oct. 13, 1975, p. 54.)

These are strong words but they speak to society's tendency to place superior status on the male and inferior status on the female, and they speak to what happens when the status of each is pushed to the extreme.

As men and women not immune to our environment, even before we can read for ourselves, we know who we are and where we belong. Little girls become the "Little Red Riding Hoods" of society, promising the strong, helpful woodsman that they will "never, no never wander off into the woods as long as they live." (Message: if they "wander" and get raped, it is their fault.) Little boys are really supposed to become the woodsman and not the wolf. The trouble is, however, that there really is no difference between the cunning and strength of the "friendly" woodsman and that of the wolf; Little Red Riding Hood is helpless in the presence of either one. The heroines of our stories, our movies, our dreams only become "real" when their Prince Charming

comes along to "rescue" them. By many means, religious and secular, our environment cultivates a lack of feminine worth, convincing both male and female unjustly of a complete dependence of women upon men.

Naturally, these age-old attitudes, reinforced from generation to generation, are inherent in our legal system and enforced by our laws. Obviously, then, the existent laws reflect those needs and aspirations of the group in power. As a result, enforcing those laws becomes protection of what the powerful deem right. Experience tells us that this breeds destruction. "Inferiors" are always subconsciously (or downright consciously!) trained to be the victim of these laws: white/black; the middle aged/very young and very old; imperialist nation/colony; rich/poor; wise/foolish; male/female.

Until the time when discrimination is no longer taught in our religious and secular societies so as to enable us to delete it from our law books, women will continue to get raped. As it stands now, rape is not the forerunner to rape laws, it is the result; rape is not the reason that men "protect" women, it is the result of that "protection;" rape is not the cause of women's powerless position in society, it is the result of men assuming the power; in other words, rape is the product of already existing sexism and sex role patterns.

Marilyn Klaus from Peona, Illinois, graduated from The Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries last spring.

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CIVIL ACTION FOR ASSAULT (RAPE) VICTIMS?

Under the rule of Henry II, one of the two appeals that a woman could bring to the king's court was that of claiming rape. Below is an account of the procedure she was to follow:

"She must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry, to the neighboring townships

and there show the injury done to her to men of good repute, the blood and her torn garments. And in the same way she ought to go to the reeve of the hundred, the king's serjeant, the coroners and the sheriff. And let her make her appeal at the first county court, unless she can at once make her complain directly to the lord king or his justices, where she will be told to sue at the county court. Let her appeal be enrolled in the coroner's rolls, every word of the appeal, exactly as she makes it, and the year and day on which she makes it. A day will be given her at the coming of the justices, at which let her again put forward her appeal before them, in the same words as she made it in the county court, from which she is not permitted to depart lest the appeal fall because of the variance . . ."

The accused had several possible defenses, to say:

"that he had her as his concubine and amica before the day and the year mentioned in the appeal . . . or that he had her and defiled her with her consent and not against her will, and that if she now appeals him it is in hatred of another women whom he has as his concubine, or whom he has married, or that it is at the instigation of one of her kinsmen. He may also expect that on the year and day the deed was supposed to be done he was elsewhere, outside the realm . . . Or he may also except on the ground of an omission made in the appeal . . . Many other matters may constitute exceptions though I do not now call them to mind." (Quotes are from Henry Bracton, an authority accepted by later prominent men of English jurisprudence, and also be Brownmiller, op. cit., pp. 17-18.)

The procedure outlined in the above quotation, as well as the assumptions that

are made, do not vary all that much from the modern situation.

A western Canada lawyer suggests that victims of rape should hit the rapist where it hurts most--in the pocketbook--and forget about pressing charges against the offenders.

In a criminal trial the women has everything to lose and nothing to gain. Far too often she becomes a witness for the prosecution and no more. And in many cases she receives no legal advice as to her right to speak or not to speak in court.

The burden of proof is much less in a civil case of assault than in a criminal case. In a criminal trial the crown must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt; in a civil trial the court needs only be persuaded that it is probable that an assault took place. The victim need only prove to the court that physical assault took place after the attacker has been identified. What weapon he used and where he put it is not crucial in a civil suit. In a civil suit attempted rape or mere threat of rape may be considered as an assault.

In view of the above, should present laws covering sex offences be repealed and new laws be embraced? Current laws in many instances still reflect the fears and misconceptions of the past without protecting the victims or offenders. Present laws often are not deterrents. Of all violent crimes the conviction rate for rape is the lowest. In the State of New York, in 1967, 30% of all felony indictments ended in convictions, 13% of all rape. According to a 1969 report of the same state, arrests for rape went from 1,500 in 1960 to 1,800 in 1967, but indictments decreased from 600 to 400 and convictions from 120 to 50, that is 2½% in 1967! (Quoted from Edith Barnett, "Legal Aspects of Rape in New York State," Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women, p. 134.) In Edmonton police records show that less than five per cent of rape offenders were convicted in 1974, as against 75 percent convicted for other assaults.

Law is a system, which, ideally, takes both sides in any situation into account, but

law also arises out of the social milieu. Law is constantly changing in response to new societal attitudes and pressures. Reformed rape laws will not decrease the number of assaults but laws do influence and encourage public feelings. Psychologists, lawyers and criminologists seem to agree that rape should not be viewed as a sexual crime but as a violent assault. And it is perhaps in working to change the legislation, in helping to change attitudes and eliminate discrimination in the courts, that some of the incidence of violence can be decreased.

--Erna Klassen

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WAS HE ASKING FOR IT?

...the article asks us to imagine a robbery victim undergoing the same sort of cross-examination that a rape victim does:

"Mr. Smith, you were held up at gunpoint on the corner of First and Main?"

"Yes."

"Did you struggle with the robber?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"HE WAS ARMED."

"Then you made a conscious decision to comply with his demands rather than resist?"

"Yes."

"Did you scream? Cry out?"

"NO. I WAS AFRAID."

"I see. Have you ever been held up before?"

"No."

"Have you ever given money away?"

"YES, OF COURSE."

"And you did so willingly?"

"WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?"

"Well, let's put it like this, Mr. Smith. You've given money away in the past. In fact you have quite a reputation for philanthropy. How can we be sure you weren't contriving to have your money taken by force?"

"LISTEN, IF I WANTED---"

"Never mind. What time did this hold-up take place?"

"About 11 p.m."

"You were out on the street at 11 p.m.? Doing what?"

"Just walking."

"Just walking? You know that it's dangerous being out on the street that late at night. Weren't you aware that you could have been held up?"

"I hadn't thought about it."

"What were you wearing?"

"Let's see---a suit. Yes, a suit."

"An expensive suit?"

"Well---yes. I'm a successful lawyer, you know."

"In other words, Mr. Smith, you were walking around the streets late at night in a suit that practically advertised the fact that you might be a good target for some easy money, isn't that so? I mean, if we didn't know better, Mr. Smith, we might even think that you were asking for this to happen, mightn't we?"

--from Ms.

* * *

RAPE: PREVENTION AND RESISTANCE

Women should learn not to be nice to potential rapist, a study by the Queen's Bench Foundation, an organization of women attorneys and judges, concluded last year. Their discoveries relate mainly to rape by strangers, rather than rape by acquaintances, which accounts for at least half of all rape. Their report, "Rape: Prevention and Resistance," notes that the rapists studied turned out to be losers--ineffectual, insecure men who fear women and assault them to assert dominance and enhance their tiny sense of self-worth. Not one of the offenders interviewed by the Foundation said lack of sexual outlet provoked his act. The rape victims, as distinguished from victims of attempted rape, tended to be timid and to project an image of vulnerability. When accosted they ignored inner warning signals or dismissed them as paranoia. When attacked they tended to collapse into terror rather than concentrating on defense. Most of the offenders in the study told interviewers they intended to rape somebody that day and searched for a suitable victim until they found one. The women they chose seemed to them, vulnerable and/or available. They avoided self-assured, assertive women. In almost half the cases,

a casual conversation preceded the attack. It often lasted more than ten minutes and was friendly and impersonal.

One question the study did not answer is whether, once a rapist has identified a woman as vulnerable and has begun his attack, she should resist violently. "With almost equal frequency," the researchers reported, "resistance deterred rape, or made the assailant angrier, or made him feel 'dominant' and 'good,' or scared him. It was at this stage that violence intensified." The woman is compelled to make a highly personal choice here, they concluded, a choice that may depend on whether her assailant has a weapon. "There is no magic rule," the director of the research said. "Nothing works in every case."

The best method to avoid rape is to act assertively at the first moments of contact with a potential rapist. The woman's protection lies in "awareness and ability to keep cool, pay attention to cues and respond assertively," the director says. "She should be firm and reassert her control."

For copies of the report, write to Queen's Bench Foundation, 244 California St., Suite 210, San Francisco, CA 94111

--adapted from a report by
Rasa Gustaitis in Mother Jones, Feb.-March 1977.

- Any research, comments from anyone on nonresistance or nonviolence and rape?

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RELATED RESOURCES

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Brownmiller, Susan. Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape. New York: Bantam Books, 1975.

_____. "The Real Spoils of War." Ms., December, 1975.

Burgess, Ann Wolbert and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom. Rape: Victims of Crisis. Maryland: Robert J. Brady Company, Bowie, 1974.

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Davis, Angela. "Joanne Little, The Dialectics of Rape." Ms., June, 1975.

Medea, Andra and Kathleen Thompson. Against Rape. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974.

Pizzey, Erin. Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear. Penguin Books, 1974.

"Rape Alert." Newsweek, November 10, 1975.

"Revolt Against Rape," Time, October 13, 1975.

Sawatzky, Sharon R., "Rape: Keeping Women in Their Place." The Mennonite, September 28, 1976.

Storaska, Frederic. How to Say No to a Rapist--And Survive. New York, Warner Books, 1976.

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LETTERS

Dear People,

A Mennonite friend passed me a copy of your Report #13 and I was really thrilled with it. I am wondering if you have any spare copies which you could send to me for members of a class which I will be teaching at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., this summer.

The class is "Women in Church and Society", July 25 to August 12 and I expect about 30 people. Although the focus will be on women, the roles of men will necessarily be implied and will be discussed also. Yet, as you know, there is very little Christian material on masculinity.

I am looking forward to the publication of the Yoder book on men's roles, but Report #13 has its own merits and I would very much like my students to have a copy.

In the meantime, could you put me on your mailing list? And is there a subscription for non-Mennonite readers? I would very much like to receive the April and June editions. I am sending a copy of this letter to Gayle Gerber Koontz, so that she will have a direct affirmation from me of all her efforts. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,
Kathy Storrie
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Editors Note: There is no subscription fee for non-Mennonite readers.

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NEWS

Forty Mennonite women and men concerned about using the gifts of both sexes in the church met at a Persons in Ministry conference June 16-18 near Sedalia, Colorado. Perry and Liz Yoder were main resource persons.

Others shared personal pilgrimages: many of the women related stories of being interested in ministry in their growing up years (preaching to the chickens), but never thinking that the pastoral ministry would be open to a woman. One told of being ousted from church as a youth group president because of her sex. In addition to a findings committee report the conference members suggested and took actions to explore and implement regional conferences for next year with one probably in Akron, Pa.; to encourage women pastors' preaching in other congregations to give people exposure to women in the ministry; to work with the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women to develop a list of women resources for the churches; to provide vocational counseling for women students at seminaries; to write histories of women in the church, and to encourage more young people to be ministers. The conference reflected, to a degree, the ambivalence in the churches between the one-leader ministry and shared leadership in the church.

*--adapted from a report by
Lois Barrett*

Twenty-four out of thirty leaders for workshops focusing on the family were men at the General Conference Mennonite Church triennial sessions held in Bluffton, Ohio in August. Men led workshops on "Effective Parenting," "Divorce and Remarriage," "Christian Parenting," "Television and the Family," "Male-Female Roles," "Communicating the Faith in the Family," "Christian Approaches to Sexuality," "Abortion," "Life Enrichment as we Grow Older," "Preparation for Marriage," and "After High School --What Then?" Women led or assisted with workshops on "Singleness in the Church," "Single Parenting," "Making Good Marriages Better," "Developmentally Disabled" and "The Family After the Children are Gone." In public sessions, however, women were more visible than in previous sessions.

Women and the Church retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Box 145, Mt. Pleasant, Pa. 15666 has been re-scheduled due to low registrations and schedule pressures. October 28-30 are the new dates. Mennonite Church pastor Emma Richards will not be able to attend because of other responsibilities but

Martha Smith, a recent graduate of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, has agreed to join the resource team. Martha has assumed pastoral responsibilities at churches in Smithville, Ohio and Elkhart, Indiana and at LaJunta Hospital in Colorado. Write or call Laurelville for retreat information. Phone: 412-423-2056.

VERBS. . . notes on people in action

- . . .Pauline Kennel, Doris Kramer, Emma Richards and Keith Schrag, all participants in the June Persons in Ministry Conference in Colorado, were instrumental in setting up a discussion group and two seminars on "Women on the Way" at the subsequent Mennonite Church Assembly at Estes Park, Colorado. One hundred persons participated. . .
- . . .Dorothy Yoder Nyce completed a year of part-time graduate study at several theological schools in Boston. Her courses included women's ordination, the psychological history of women focused through exclusion, role/image of women in the Reformation, and women in the pulpit ministry in 19th century United States. . .
- . . .Anne Rupp, co-pastor of the Pleasant Oaks Mennonite Church, led the major Sunday worship service at the triennial General Conference sessions in Ohio in early August. . .
- . . .Former Peace Section member Lora Oyer who shares concerns about the role of women in the church was elected president of the General Conference Women in Mission.
- . . .Gayle Gerber Koontz, graduate student in religion at Boston University, completed papers on the status of women in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia and on the meaning of feminism for modern Egyptian Islam.
- . . .Hedy Sawadsky led a workshop on singleness at the Bluffton triennial conference. . .
- . . .How have you or someone you know been unfolding? Drop us a line or two. . .

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, Editor, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

Send address changes to Peace Section, MCC, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501.

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